

August 21, 2009 - Showcase Visitors Get Their Hands on High-Tech Military Gadgets

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Showcase visitors get their hands on high-tech military gadgets

By Mitch Fryer

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Jim Walsh put on the special sunglasses and took over the controls of a Remote Air Refueling Operator (RARO) demonstrator at the Boeing booth during the public showcase of the county's 11th annual ARMTech Showcase of Industry and Technology at the Belmont Complex on Thursday evening.

It's not every day the public gets their hands on high-tech military applications like that.

"It's giving you feedback," Boeing representative Alton Lundin told Walsh. "You really feel it in the control stick."

"It's really responsive," answered Walsh, 17, of Springdale, who is enrolled in the Pennsylvania Cyber School taking classes through Indiana University of Pennsylvania's Northpointe Campus in South Buffalo. "You could feel any motion there was in it."

"And off it goes," Lundin said.

Kittanning area businessman Fred Bonello took his turn at the controls and tried to fly the simulated refueling tanker to a point.

"Isn't this crazy," Bonello said, pulling back.
"It's so easy a caterer can do it."

Lundin instructed both would-be military pilots to avoid the turbulence and climb to a destination where there is calmer air.

It's equipment like that that draws hundreds to the Belmont this and every year to see and play with exhibits and demonstrations and ask questions of national defense contractors, see the technical products made by regional and local companies and hear them explain all things technical best left to the scientists and engineers.

"By the public coming to the showcase, we get to show how we're growing the technical capabilities in this area and getting the young kids interested and educated in math and science, the jobs of the future," said Karl Harris, PhD., the director of the Penn State Electro-Optics Center in the county's Northpointe Industrial Park in South Buffalo.

"The kids want to know why they need to do this (math and science in school)," Harris said. "Coming here and seeing this gives them the why."

Harris didn't need to tell that to Walsh.

Walsh said he is interested in a career in electro-optics.

"It's amazing at the E-O Center," Walsh said. "It's a great experience coming to ARMTEch because of the field I'm going into."

That made the news even more exciting for him that officials of the Penn State Electro-Optics Center (EOC) announced at the public showcase that they have been awarded \$20 million in multiple contracts in support of existing and new programs with the Department of Defense.

"These awards and accomplishments are a reflection of the wonderful talent, perseverance and dedication that our entire staff demonstrates every day to support our warfighters," Harris said.

Most recently the EOC was awarded a two-year \$11.5 million contract from Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division for work to support the Navy's next generation of radar devices, common data sensor architecture and to construct 360 degree panoramic buoy systems.

The EOC was awarded three contracts with the Army totaling \$4 million to develop force protection and surveillance systems. The EOC will integrate, evaluate and deliver cameras and other sensor systems to support the need to protect the perimeters of military installations and develop multi-sensor payload systems for surveillance from the air.

The U.S. Missile Defense Agency has awarded the EOC a \$3 million contract to integrate and troubleshoot high-performance sensors for missile-flight experiments.

EOC officials said a night vision system for the Navy already built and delivered will save the government at least \$25 million per year by giving the Defense Department the ability to inspect and reuse tubes from night vision systems returned from the field.

"ARMTech is a whole show," Harris said.

"There are many companies here and we (EOC) are interacting with them. We're here trying to facilitate connections with what their products are and what the Department of Defense might need."

Rep. John Murtha, D-Johnstown, who will attend the business-to-business showcase of ARMTech today, praised the county's public showcase.

"ARMTech provides a chance to show off the exciting technologies being developed and services being performed right here in Armstrong County," Murtha said. "Much of the success can be attributed to the EOC, which is an international leader in the field of electro-optics. Its continued success is a testament to the talent of our region's workforce, its work ethic and the business opportunities that exist here."